

BELL TELEPHONE OF PENNSYLVANIA BUILDING  
(Verizon Building)  
416-420 Seventh Avenue  
Pittsburgh  
Allegheny County  
Pennsylvania

HABS PA-6725  
*PA-6725*

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20240-0001

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HABS NO. PA-6725

LOCATION: 416-420 Seventh Avenue, Pittsburgh, Allegheny County,  
Pennsylvania.

DATE OF  
CONSTRUCTION: 1890

ARCHITECT: Frederick J. Osterling

PRESENT OWNER: Verizon Communications, Inc.

SIGNIFICANCE: This building, which served as Bell Telephone of Pennsylvania's switching hall, may be one of the oldest telecommunications facilities still in use in the country. It is an excellent example of the Romanesque Revival Style popularized by Henry Hobson Richardson.

DESCRIPTION: This seven-story building constructed Romanesque Revival Style is seven bays wide by ten bays long. On the north front facade, a rusticated sandstone base supports a three-story brick arcade with alternating Roman and segmental arches. Above, the fifth and sixth stories are lit by windows contained within a pair of trefoil arches below a brick, Roman-arched arcade. At the seventh story, rectangular windows topped by a corbelled brick cornice are set off by a pair of rounded projecting corner bays at either side. The exterior load-bearing walls are constructed of thick masonry walls, mostly brick. The interior is wooden post-and-beam construction, as no steel was used to support the building.

HISTORY: Bell Telephone of Pennsylvania built this structure for use as a switching hall in 1890, employing leading local architect, Frederick J. Osterling. One of tallest commercial buildings constructed at the time in downtown Pittsburgh, the building shows the influence of H. H. Richardson, the Brookline, Massachusetts, architect who had recently designed the Allegheny County Courthouse and Jail. As the business grew, Bell Telephone expanded into several other buildings on this block, including a 1905 eleven-story tower to the south by Alden & Harlow, Richardson's successor firm. The company later hired James T.

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HABS NO. PA-6725  
(Page 2)

Windrim of Philadelphia to design a twenty-story, limestone-clad headquarters building to the east along Seventh Avenue, built in 1923.

SOURCES: Franklin Toker. Buildings of Pittsburgh. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007.  
James D. Van Trump, "The Romanesque Revival Style in Pittsburgh." *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol. XVI. No. 3, October 1957, p. 22-29.

PROJECT INFORMATION: This short-form history was prepared to supplement photographic documentation of historic sites in western Pennsylvania. In 2005 Nicholas Traub photographed several sites for the *Buildings of Western Pennsylvania* publications, with funding from HABS/HAER/HALS. The Society of Architectural Historians cosponsored the photography project and is producing two volumes, *Buildings of Pittsburgh* and *Buildings of Pennsylvania: Pittsburgh and Western Pennsylvania* as part of their *Buildings of the United States* series published by the University of Virginia Press. The documentation was facilitated by Lu Donnelly, Project Director, Buildings of Western Pennsylvania, for the Heinz Architectural Center at the Carnegie Museum of Art in Pittsburgh. The documentation was edited and transmitted in the Washington office of HABS/HAER/HALS by Christopher H. Marston, HAER Architect.